

"Pity the Fool"
Ecclesiastes 10:12-20
Pastor Dan Erickson
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D. L. Moody was a great evangelist in the 1800's, kind of the Billy Graham of his day. During his meetings, he sometimes faced antagonistic hecklers. In the final service of one campaign, an usher handed Moody a note as he entered the auditorium. It was actually from an atheist who had been giving the evangelist a great deal of trouble. Moody, however, supposed that it was an announcement, so he quieted the large audience and prepared to read it. Opening the folded piece of paper he found scrawled in large print only one word: "Fool!" Moody, however, did not lose his composure. He said, "I have just been handed a memo which contains the single word -- 'Fool'. This is most unusual. I've often heard of those who have written letters and forgotten to sign their names, but this is the first time I've ever heard of anyone who signed his name and then forgot to write the letter!"

Well, friends, "Fool" is not a very nice word. Jesus warns us about using the term literally. Yet, in the Old Testament books from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes Solomon, the richest and wisest man of the ancient world uses the term 51 times. It is a label used in contrast to a wise person. And he encourages everyone to strive to become wise, rather than being content as a fool.

Friends, today our journey through Ecclesiastes brings us to chapter 10:12-20. Here we explore some of Solomon's observations on foolish people. Let's pause and pray that the Lord would help us understand what these words mean for our lives today.

What does Solomon mean by the term "fool?" It has nothing to do with intelligence or education. There are some very smart, well-educated fools around. Nor are we talking about a mischievous, practical joker. According to the Bible, foolishness is primarily a spiritual problem **Psalms 14:1 says Only fools say in their hearts, "There is no God." They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good!**

Folks, I think this applies to both theoretical and practical atheists. Theoretical atheists are the people who claim their minds cannot accept the

idea that God exists. Madelyn Murray O'Hare, Richard Dawkins, probably some professors at every state university in the country. These folks are often loud proponents of neo-Darwinism and scientific naturalism.

Practical atheists are folks who will say, "Yes, I believe God exists." They may even go to church on Sunday, but these folks live life without ever thinking about God. For all practical purposes they may as well be ... atheists.

Now, the Bible draws a clear connection between this rejection of God and oral behavior. In the book of Proverbs, we read that **The folly of fools is deceit (14:1). Fools mock at sin (14:9). Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool (10:23).** These characteristics exist because **Proverbs 19:3 The foolish man's heart rages against the Lord.**

Now, I know most atheists, theoretical and practical, object to this description. Maybe some of you would say, "Pastor Dan, you are being too hard on these folks. I know some atheists who are very nice people." Well, I do too.

Yet, when people pay no attention to God, they tend to see themselves as the ultimate moral authority. "I can decide for myself what is right and wrong, what is good and bad. No one is going to tell me how I should live." Both hard core atheists and church attending, practical atheists will speak those words.

Now, some who set their own moral standards, who don't pay attention to what God says in the Bible can be very nice people, at least sometimes. Yet, even Bertrand Russell, a well-known atheist philosopher, realized there was an inherent problem when people reject any moral authority higher than themselves. He said, "Never discuss atheism with the maids. If they stop believing in God, they will steal the silverware."

Indeed, a variety of studies have found that people who are religious and go to church tend to be more honest and generous than secular people. I remember reading a book entitled "The Persecutor." It was written by Sergio Kourdakov, a Russian. As a young man he was a nice person.

He naturally despised bullies. Yet, because as a communist he didn't believe in God, he was able to rationalize and justify all sorts of cruel behavior on his part. This included beating up and killing people who were Christians.

As one woman, who witnessed the death of just 100 of the over 100 million people killed by communist governments in the 20th century, said, "These things are happening because people have forgotten God." If a person rejects or ignores the Lord, if that individual is a fool, his/her behavior will eventually be affected, and it will *not* be a good thing.

Okay, let's get to our text, Ecclesiastes 10, and explore some of Solomon's thoughts on foolishness. **Ecclesiastes 10:12-14a Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips. At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness and the fool multiplies words.**

Solomon says that fools like to talk and talk. What they say frequently reveals the emptiness of their souls. Their words are often vile and bitter and the people around a fool, his co-workers, neighbors, even family and friends, are often wounded by these sharp daggers. There are many people who still experience great pain because of foolish words spoken by a parent, a spouse or another individual. Foolish words can hurt for a *long time*.

Solomon goes on to describe some other practical results of foolishness. **Ecclesiastes 10:14b No one knows what is coming, who can tell him what will happen after him?** A fool often makes confident predictions about how things are going to be. They boast about plans for the future, forgetting that God alone is the one who knows what tomorrow will bring.

Listen to what the Lord tells us in **James 4:13-15 Look here, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit?" How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow?... What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that."**

Not only is a fool oblivious to his ignorance of the future, he/she often lacks common sense. **Ecclesiastes 10:15 A fool's work wearies him; he does not know the way to town.** Now, that verse reminds me of my very brilliant college roommate, who often could not remember where his car was. He didn't just have trouble finding it in a parking lot, he often didn't know which parking lot it was in or if it was at our apartment that was just a few blocks from school.

Yet, I don't think Solomon is referring to the absent-minded professor. I believe he is speaking figuratively of people who may know all sorts of things but don't know the things that are necessary for life. Again, a fool may have a high IQ, but a big part of wisdom is not just having knowledge but being able to apply it.

Solomon goes on to note that the worst fools are not necessarily the most foolish, but those who have the most influence. He directs his comments to his readers and says, **Ecclesiastes 10:16, 17 Woe to you. O land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning. Blessed are you. O land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time—for strength and not for drunkenness.**

Listen to how the NLT reads, **Ecclesiastes 10:16,17 A country is in for trouble when its ruler is childish, and its leaders party all day long. But a nation will prosper when its ruler is mature, and its leaders don't part too much.** When I read these verses, I think of the old Soviet Union when the communists took over, it would often be the least qualified who were put in charge. A criminal would frequently be named as mayor of a city. And partying too much, drinking too much vodka, was a big problem for the communist leaders in the Soviet bloc. It is sad when a nation is governed by foolish rulers.

It is even more sad when the people themselves choose fools to govern them. I often wonder how, in 1933, Germany, the best educated people on earth at the time, could select Adolph Hitler as their leader. Yes, I suspect he was gifted in some ways, but Solomon would certainly characterize men like Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, as total fools. This passage is a reminder to all of us, that when we choose leaders, we should be looking for wise individuals, *not fools*.

Solomon then notes that fools tend to be irresponsible. **Ecclesiastes 10:18 If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks.** I hope none of you guys are getting dirty looks or even an elbow in the ribs from your wife right now. Now, I suspect the reason for many household repairs not getting done is hectic schedules, not slothfulness. Yet, procrastination and laziness are certainly not virtues, and if these are problems in your life you need to deal with them.

Solomon adds, Ecclesiastes 10:19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything. The characteristics of a lazy fool have not changed much over the last 3000 years. “Why work when we can drink and party? As long as we have enough money to do that, everything is fine.” People spending money on parties and alcohol, instead of on the things that need to be done at home, like fixing the roof or paying the heating bills, can still be a problem in our community today...

Solomon concludes this chapter with a practical observation: Be careful what you say and to whom you say it. **Ecclesiastes 10:20 Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird of the air may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say.**

Have you ever heard the phrase “a little bird told me?” This may be where it comes from. Now, Solomon was not talking about parrots or anything like that. He was just observing that words which we say, especially negative words about someone else, tend to get repeated. Even when we think the person we are talking to will keep what we say in confidence, things tend to slip out.

So, the wise person is discreet about what he says, and very cautious to whom he says it. Now, in my opinion, this chapter is not nearly as infected by gossip as some others of which I am familiar. Most folks at Chisholm Baptist Church are pretty careful as he/she should be. So, a word to the wise, guard your tongue. Be careful what you say and to whom you say it.

Okay, these are Solomon’s reflections, and I think they lead naturally to a couple questions.

#1 What do I do if I have been living like a fool? What do I do if I have made foolish mistakes that continue to cause trouble and pain in my life? Well, folks the Bible offers more than pity for fools, it offers hope. God promises that anyone, no matter how foolish he/she may be, anyone who turns to the Lord, will find forgiveness and another chance.

That is great news for fools. I suspect someone here maybe thinking, “Oh, Pastor Dan, it is too later for me. After all the things I have done, all the mistakes I’ve made, my life cannot be fixed.”

Oh friends, remember though all the kings’ horses and all the kings’ men cannot put your life back together again, the King of Kings can. The Lord Jesus can pour His grace into your life and fill you with hope and with joy. Yes, as we mentioned last week, you may still experience some of the consequences of your foolishness. Yet, the Lord promises to heal those wounds and even though scars remain, they won’t hurt anymore.

Friends, if you are inclined not to turn to the Lord because you still struggle with the folly of atheism, theoretical or practical, I encourage you to think a little harder and be a little more honest with yourself. Theoretical atheism is a dying philosophy.

A few years ago, Anthony Flew, a premier atheist scholar, change his mind and became a theist, a believer in God. He realized there is overwhelming evidence that the universe we inhabit must have been designed by someone.

Folks, we are not a cosmic accident. And remember, if everything is a cosmic accident, if the physical world is all there is, then we not only lack any real basis for morals, but genuine meaning and knowledge also are beyond our reach.

If our brains are nothing more than chemicals that just happened to come together a certain way, we have no way of knowing whether the thoughts we think correspond to reality. The world proposed by the theoretical atheists, scientific naturalism, is a very dark one indeed.

Yet, practical atheism is even more foolish than theoretical atheism. To acknowledge that God exists but then live as if that doesn't matter is totally absurd. If the creator and sovereign of the universe exists that certainly makes all the difference in the world.

If you are one of those folks who believes in God, but just doesn't have time for Him, I encourage you to abandon that folly. If you have been living like a fool and are not a Christian, not a believer in Jesus, what you need to do today is turn to Him.

As God's spirit enables, you need to stop trusting in yourself, stop pretending you are okay the way you are, and by faith receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. That is the first and most important step of recovering from foolishness. If you are not sure what I mean by this, please give me a call.

Now, if you are a Christian, you can still be pretty foolish. Maybe you are an occasional practical atheist, who now and then chooses to treat God as if He didn't exist. If so, I encourage you to turn from that folly. Instead get on the path of wisdom, where, as we talked about last week, you can soar like an eagle, live as God intended and experience hope and joy.

The **first** step in getting on the path is just admitting you have goofed up and confessing your sin to the Lord. Our Father is more than willing to forgive us and helps us get back on the right track. Then we need to make sure we are reading the Bible, hearing what God's perspective on things really is. Psalm 19 says God's word makes wise the simple. It has the power to turn a fool into a wise person as well.

Spending time in prayer, attending church regularly, and having good Christian friends who will hold you accountable are also very helpful if we want to get out of or avoid the trap of foolishness. So, friends, if you have been living like a fool, remember: *it is not too late*. Turn to the Lord Jesus today. Again, if you are not sure what that means, make sure you give me a call.

#2 What do I do if I live with a fool? What if I have a spouse, a child, a close friend, a boss, a teacher or a next-door neighbor who is being very foolish? What can I do? Well, friends, I know this is a real

question for some of you. It can be very, very difficult to have a close relationship with a fool. That type of person can make your life miserable. Let me just give you some quick advice and maybe you will find something I say to be helpful.

First, don't be too hard on yourself. The Bible tells us, Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. This is an important command for all of us to strive to follow and it is also a reminder that some people will be very hard to get along with no matter how hard we try. Fools are often in that category. But... we cannot give up. For our own sakes, for the sake of the fools around us, and most importantly for the glory of God, we need to keep striving to live the foolish people in our lives.

Second, don't call the person who is being foolish "a fool." At least, only use the word sparingly. Yes, I have used it today because it is the term found in our text. But even though it may be an accurate description of someone you know, a more gentle label is often more effective.

Remember what the Lord tells us in **2 Timothy 2:24-26** **And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.** This is good advice for dealing with a fool.

Third, avoid most arguments with a person who is being foolish. Yes, sometimes you need to speak up and try to show the error of his/her thinking. But remember, a fool's problem is usually not up here, in the head, but down here, in the heart. The fool doesn't need to learn more facts, nearly as much as he or she needs a change of heart, a change in attitude toward God. Only the Holy Spirit can make that change happen. Often prayer is a much better tool for helping a fool than argument.

Fourth, there is always hope...even for the most foolish fool. We need to remember that each of us at one time was a foolish person. Before we knew Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, before the Holy

Spirit had given us spiritual life and enabled us to understand the truth, we were all fools.

Pretty smart fools perhaps, rather nice fools maybe, but fools. God in His grace, however, has delivered us from our foolishness. Oh, not totally. I don't know about you, but I still think, say and do some pretty foolish things. Actually, I do know about you. You sometimes think, say and do some pretty foolish things as well.

But praise God, by His grace, those of us who are believers in Jesus are not nearly as foolish as we used to be. And by God's grace the people in your life who are fools can become much wiser than they are today. We need to pray that will happen. We must not give up praying that this will happen. Because we want God's wisdom to fill us, and those around us, today and in the days ahead.